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Sixth-grader Danny Rockingham's favorite subject at Novak-King School in North Chicago is math. He also likes chess club after school.

"It's a mind game. You have to think," he said.

He doesn't know much about federal impact aid, and how it affects North Chicago schools. But his school day and extracurricular activities wouldn't be the same without it.

About 15 percent of the total funding for North Chicago School District 187 comes from impact aid, which is given to schools to compensate for lost property tax revenue due to federal property being located in the district.

The district received about \$7.1 million from the U.S. Department of Education last year for the approximately 1,300 children of military families living or working on the Naval Stations Great Lakes that the district educates, said Marietta Cheatam, chief financial officer for the district.

She didn't want to speculate on what programs or materials would have to be cut if the district didn't receive its impact aid, but said, "It would probably put us in a pretty bad position."

North Chicago qualified for heavily impacted status because 30 percent of the 4,323 students enrolled in the district live on the base or their parents work there.

With the Navy in the midst of a \$250 million privatization housing project on the base, the numbers of students living on the base and attending North Chicago schools has dropped during the past two years.

"The numbers are changing and going down for the students because of the realignment of the base," Cheatam said. "We predict that it will go down this year. We don't have our exact count this year. But it's gone down the last two years."

Every year a survey is sent home with students for their families to fill out and return, which is used to determine the number of students who qualify. So when the surveys go out later this fall, it's critical every student is counted.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) found a provision in federal law that would allow North Chicago to maintain its heavily impacted status during the housing conversion on the base, even if less than 30 percent of the district's students come from the base. But that safety net only lasts until 2011, two years after construction is finished on the base.

In January, Kirk introduced a bill in the House which would allow three school districts in the 10th Congressional district -- North Chicago, Highland Park and Glenview -- to pool their military students in order to be reimbursed at the highest "heavy impact" level. If passed, it would help North Chicago have enough students from military bases to maintain its heavily impacted status. The bill would also allow Glenview and Highland Park schools to be paid at the higher heavy impact rate. Currently Glenview and Highland Park schools do not meet the heavy impact threshold and receive between \$600 and \$900 per student.

"North Chicago would still get the lion's share because it has the most students," Kirk said.

Senators Barrack Obama and Dick Durban introduced similar legislation in the Senate in January.

Impact Aid is so vital to the district that twice a year school board members and administrators go to Washington, D.C., to lobby for Impact Aid. Earlier this month, four school board members and two administrators met with legislators and their staff, said Deputy Superintendent Lauri Hakanen.

"It's a renewal year for the Impact Aid bill," Hakanen said. "The second thing we're pushing for is to maximize the dollars in the bill."

North Chicago is one of about 1,400 districts around the country that receive a total of about \$1.2 billion in impact aid annually.

The only other Lake County district that receives impact aid is North Shore School District 112, which mostly serves students in Highland Park and Highwood. It has about 40 students who live on the Army Reserve base at Fort Sheridan, said Greg Kurr, assistant superintendent for District 112. Recent privatization of housing on Fort Sheridan is expected to more than quadruple the number of students as early as next fall.

"We're looking at an increase of military dependent students in excess of 200 students," he said.

North Shore receives about \$800 to \$900 in impact aid per student. North Chicago receives more than \$5,290 per student for its heavily impacted status.

"The more dollars we have the better equipped we are to educate our children," Cheatam said.